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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: HUN SEN MANEUVERS OVER POSSIBLE THAKSIN VISIT

REF: A. PHNOM PENH 811

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2746

Classified By: DCM THEODORE ALLEGRA FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Cambodian officials cite personal relations as justification for a possible visit by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in November. Some also cite the Preah Vihear situation, which has seen no diplomatic movement since April. Prime Minister Hun Sen appears to be taking a longer view of Cambodian-Thai relations -- maneuvering to keep the current government attentive to Cambodia's needs while cozying up to a potential future (read Pheua Thai) government in Bangkok grateful for Cambodia's strong support.

Hun Sen's bottom line seems to be a deal on Preah Vihear that both countries can live with, even if one Thai party cannot. In the meantime, Thai and Cambodian regional military commanders reinforced October 27 the message that armed confrontation should be avoided. Although units on both sides remain on alert, peaceful intentions were reiterated by line commanders at Preah Vihear on October 29, who voiced support for the bilateral Joint Border Committee. END SUMMARY.

No Official Confirmation?

[1](#)2. (C) Noun Chivorn, Deputy Director-General of the MFA ASEAN Department confirmed October 29 that no official messages had been received regarding a visit by Thaksin. Noting the heavy media speculation, he said that the story was being driven by the newspapers since Hun Sen's remarks on October 21 inviting Thaksin to Cambodia and offering to appoint him as an economic advisor. Phay Siphon, Secretary of State and Spokesperson in the Council of Ministers, echoed the view that a media frenzy had stirred up a hornet's nest but noted that so far, there had been only one personal message delivered to Hun Sen from Thaksin expressing gratitude for Hun Sen's personal support. On October 30 MFA spokesperson Koy Kuong repeated there were no official indications of a visit but added that reports from the press of an impending Thaksin visit appeared to be "credible."

Only a Personal Relationship?

[1](#)3. (C) Phay Siphon acknowledged that a visit may indeed be possible and that it would "present difficulties" for Cambodia. He nevertheless emphasized that if Thaksin chose to visit it would be the personal visit of a long-term friend. Sry Thamarong, close foreign affairs advisor to Hun Sen, said that the whole matter should be viewed as "only personal" with no connection to official relations between Cambodia and Thailand. He nonetheless hinted that a short visit was in the works. "Thaksin has no business here," he said. "He has billions to look after elsewhere," he emphasized, "so even if Thaksin came for a visit to Cambodia, he would have no reason to stay." When asked about the extradition of Thaksin from Cambodia to Thailand, Phay Siphon

said that Cambodia reserved the right to interpret its treaty obligations consistent with international law. (NOTE: On October 23, a hastily issued MFA press release stated that Cambodia would not extradite Thaksin to Thailand. END NOTE.)

Phay Siphon emphasized that he was speaking only about a possible visit, "if" Thaksin chose to make it. That said, a senior minister advisor to Hun Sen has confirmed that Thaksin's people have been on the ground in Cambodia for some time, and that Hun Sen already signed the order appointing Thaksin an economic advisor.

Mind Boggling!

14. (C) An ASEAN embassy official commented that it "boggles the mind" to think about what Hun Sen intended when he "stuck it to the Thai" at the ASEAN summit October 23 by his statements inviting the fugitive from Thai justice and to appoint him as an economic advisor. It was embarrassing to the hosts and not in the interests of Cambodia, he noted. He speculated that Hun Sen was mad about something the Thai had done behind the scenes but noted that it "was a case of Hun Sen saying what he says and everybody scrambling to explain it."

A Diplomatic Feint and Maneuver?

15. (C) That Preah Vihear was uppermost on Hun Sen's mind before the ASEAN summit was obvious after the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had seized on an article quoting the Thai foreign minister as favoring a neutral third party

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to take up the border dispute. The RGC slyly suggested that ASEAN might be considered, causing the Thai FM to quickly clarify the record and reassert that Preah Vihear should be solved bilaterally. That Hun Sen deliberately repeated his "personal" support for Thaksin on the opening day of the ASEAN summit made it abundantly clear that he is not happy with the current Thai government and that he is not convinced the Thai government has the willingness or even the ability to resolve the Preah Vihear dispute anytime soon.

Border Meetings Ease Tensions

16. (SBU) In the meantime, Cambodian and Thai military and border officials continue to meet. Siem Reap governor Sou Phirin told embassy staff that an October 27 meeting focused on avoiding military confrontation and maintaining border security. Cambodian Military Region 4 commander Gen. Chea Mon and newly installed Thai Military Region 2 commander LTG Wiwalit Chonsamrit were in attendance, as were the three Cambodian governors from Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, and Banteay Meanchey and four deputy governors from the adjacent Thai provinces. "The meeting was unofficial" Sou Phirin said. "Both sides agreed to avoid armed confrontation and respect law and order to make the disputed border as peaceful as before that of last July. The two sides agreed to facilitate the work of the Border Committees of the two countries to implement their duty."

17. (SBU) On October 29, the line commanders at Preah Vihear met once again and Cambodian press reports indicate that although units on both sides of the border remain on high alert, their commanders repeated their joint desire for avoiding armed clashes. Cambodian Commander Srey Deuk and his Thai counterpart (identified as Gen. Suvatchai) also pledged to leave the resolution of border issues to the bilateral Joint Border Committee (JBC) (Ref A).

COMMENT

18. (C) Hun Sen wants to deal with a Thai counterpart who can

deliver on Preah Vihear. It seems clear to the RGC that the current Thai government has placed the border issue well down on the Parliamentary agenda and the lack of diplomatic movement (Ref A) reflects that low priority. By establishing informal party-to-party relations between CPP and Pheua Thai (Hun Sen met former Thai PM Chavalit October 21 as vice chairman of the CPP) Hun Sen is betting on Pheua Thai's ascendancy and is taking first steps to cement what he may view as a more productive bilateral relationship. This remains true notwithstanding the statements of other RGC officials, who have been out in force repeating the message that Thai-Cambodian relations on all fronts remain positive and friendly.

19. (C) But this reserved approach -- especially in view of protracted and incremental diplomatic activity on the border issue -- has clearly made Hun Sen impatient. He is playing to a rambunctious domestic polity fed up with perceived Thai dissembling and unable to shoulder the cost of a huge army stationed at the border. Some RGC officials have referred to the provocations of Thai yellow shirts regarding Preah Vihear, and to a general state of Thai "anarchy" as negatively affecting Cambodia (through lower numbers of tourist visits, for example). In addition, recent shootings of Cambodian civilians by Thai militia (Tahan Pahn) along the Thai border have been a festering popular grievance that was reportedly aired in the October 27 civilian-military meeting in Siem Reap. Hun Sen's flamboyant performance at Hua Hin may have had some subtle nuances after all, with a cathartic effect at home and a wake-up call for a little more respect -- and action -- from his neighbor.

RODLEY